



# WASHINGTON

## NEVER SLEPT HERE

by Leslie Lieber

Photograph by Jack Manning

**That's about the only thing that hasn't happened in the Washington Monument. Five million sight-seers have climbed its 898 steps; three have walked down on their hands. But its real monarch is a mouse**

**T**WENTY-FIVE million sight-seers have gone to the top of the Washington Monument since the day the capital's familiar landmark was dedicated almost 70 years ago, after 30 years' building. Some five million snubbed the elevator and trudged up the marble obelisk's 898 steps. At least two visitors have walked down the staircase on their hands.

But only one person in the whole wide world has been aware that a mouse has lived for years 550 feet up in the pyramidion that crowns the lofty monument to the Father of Our Country — whose birthday we and the mouse celebrate next Thursday. This mouse feeds on nothing but chewing-gum wrappers and whatever spiritual vitamins it gets from looking down at the White House from the north window.

The only person who knew about the mouse is the Grandpa of the Washington Monument — its chief custodian and nursemaid for 16 years, 60-year-old Charles L. Herman. Herman has gray hair, a rosy-red nose and wears glasses which are sometimes blown off by the gale whistling around the top of his marble beanstalk. Inside his head he carries everything worth knowing about the Washington Monument.

"If you think the mouse is unusual, let me tell you about the cat," said Herman, when I visited there recently. "A cat once jumped or fell from part way up the Monument, sailed through the air like a flying squirrel and landed safely on all fours. When the cat died they had him stuffed and put on exhibit over at the Smithsonian Institution."

### One Overnight Guest

"A FEW years ago," says Herman, "some college professor stated the Washington Monument had sunk two inches in the past fifty years. I don't know. I ain't felt anything."

One of Charley's assistants comforted him by figuring out that at the present low rate of settling, the mouse at the top won't be underground until the year 151,900 A.D.

Only one person ever spent a night in the Washington Monument. She was Mrs. S. E. Longwell, of Middlebury, Vt. One November several years ago, Monument

officials closed up and went home. Mrs. Longwell discovered to her horror that she was entombed with the bats, the howling wind and the fitting memories of a score of vanished administrations.

When the first guard appeared the following morning, the Vermont woman was almost hysterical. Ever since that night, a 62-year-old guard, Samuel Stambaugh, takes a good-night census before closing time by making a 15-minute tour of duty down the 898 steps.

### "Count Them Again"

"I DON'T know why people insist on taking those steps anyway," says Charley Herman, who has climbed them at least 1,000 times. Herman says nearly all the staircase visitors count the steps and hardly anybody ever ends up with the right tally.

"They come in here and complain that there's only eight hundred and ninety-six. I tell them to count them over again, and by golly, some of them go back and do it."

Although Mrs. Longwell's ordeal was not premeditated, scores of people try to use the Washington Monument as a foil for their publicity stunts. For instance, one morning Mr. Herman was told a gentleman wanted to see him at the front entrance. It was Blackstone, the magician. He was sitting astride a black and white pony.

"Blackstone wants to go up to the top of the Monument and make the pony disappear," said a press agent.

The boss of the Monument, taking no chances, made a quick telephone call and found out the Department of the Interior was dead set against the idea. "You know what I told Mr. Blackstone?" Herman asked me. "I went back to the entrance and said, 'Mr. Blackstone, I'm a better magician than you are. I'm going to make both you and the pony disappear. Now, move on!'"

Incidentally, a horse would feel very much at home in the Monument elevator; the government employee at the controls is Percy P. Porter, an ex-jockey, who once rode a winner named "Peter Pan" at Hialeah.

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CHARLEY HERMAN is the guardian of our most famous monument